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LENT.

BY SUSAN COOLIDGE.

Is it the fast which God approves,
When I, awhile, for flesh eat fish,
Changing one dainty dish
For others no less good!

Do angels smile and count it gain
That I compose my laughing face
To gravity for a brief space,
Then straightway laugh again?

Does heaven take pleasure as I sit
Counting my joys as usurer's gold;
This bit to give, that to withhold,
Weighing and measuring it?

Setting off abstinence from dance,
As buying privilege of song;
Calling six right and seven wrong,
With decorous countenance;

Compounding for the dull to-day
By projects for to-morrow's fun,
Checking off each set task as done,
Grudging a short delay?

I cannot think that God will care
For such observance; He can see
The very inmost heart of me
And every secret there.

But if I keep a truer Lent,
Not heeding what I wear or eat,
Not balancing the sour with sweet,
Evenly abstinent,

And lay my soul with all its stain
Of travel from the year-long road,
Between the healing hands of God
To be made clean again;

And put my sordid self away,
Forgetting for a little space
The petty prize, the eager race,
The restless, striving day;

Opening my darkness to the sun,
Opening my narrow eyes to see
The pain and need so close to me
Which I had willed to shun;

Praying God's quickening grace to show
The thing He fain would have me do;
The errand that I may pursue,
And quickly rise and go;

If so I do it, starving pride,
Fasting from sin instead of food,
God will accept such Lent as good
And bless its Easter-tide.

—The Independent.

MEANING OF IT.

The Lenten season has come; a season that may be of real use or not; it is just as we choose. In this respect like other means of grace; of benefit if we choose. Of no benefit if we do not choose.

Lent is an old English word meaning spring; the Lent fast is the spring fast; the Lent season is the church spring season. The Collect for Quinquagesima Sunday gives one meaning of this season: "send Thy Holy Ghost and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity." When we are perfect in love we shall need no more Lent, shall need no more means of grace; we shall have attained all they can do for us.

In ancient times Lent lasted forty hours; the time during which our Lord was under the power of death. By degrees the time was enlarged, till it settled down to forty days; following the example of Christ who was in the wilderness forty days. Somewhere about the seventh century the present observance prevailed. And since then the Lenten season has been much as it is now.

There are three matters which the season emphasizes; penitence; self-discipline; and special devotion. Let us speak of these.

Penitence, or as we would now say, repentance. Repentance is such sorrow for our sins as leads us to forsake them. Repentance is not sorrow for other people's sins, but for our own. So the Apostle tells us "Godly sorrow worketh repentance" is the cause or antecedent of repentance. There must be sorrow for our sins, and as there is daily sin so there must be daily sorrow. In this there is an element of godliness; it is not the sorrow of the world which worketh repentance, but the sorrow which is of God. We have sinned against God; this is the bitterness; "against Thee, Thee only have I sinned." Sin may do evil, not only against self, but against others; but it is as against God that the "Godly" sorrow comes in; and here is the great element of the sorrow that works repentance. It is not a question how great this sorrow is; nor with what emotions it is accompanied. Some may weep, some may sigh, some may do neither; but whether with much sorrow or whether with little; whether showing itself in one way or another, there is this in it; Godly sorrow leads us to give up sin, to forsake it as the one thing which God hates. To deepen this sorrow, to make it effective in turning us away from the sins which we daily commit, this is the one meaning of the Lent

season. Suppose we keep this idea before us during this season, and see what progress we can make in turning away from our sins, not the large ones merely, but the little sins, as they are called, the meanness, the impatience, the pride, the envy, the dissatisfaction because of the situation in which God has placed us.

Self-discipline, of this we know but little, and that little often misplaced; so we fancy it means we should deny ourselves this pleasure or that, this article of food or that, and when we have thus done, we say to ourselves "how good we are;" "how we do discipline ourselves in the way of Godliness." Such discipline, if it lead to real discipline is good; and indeed this is the only meaning of such acts of bodily discipline. Fasting is a good, if it lead us to discipline our bad nature and keep under our bad tempers. If it do not this, it is nothing. God is not pleased with us because we have empty stomachs; or angry with us because we have full ones. No, this Lenten discipline is for one purpose, to make us discipline our pride and selfishness, our greed and impatience. He who eats and is meek and patient and kind and loving, is a thousand times better than he who eats not and is cross and impatient and unkind and makes his family and dependents unhappy around him. Lent means, discipline your laziness, discipline your greed and covetousness, discipline your pride and vanity, discipline your selfishness and self-seeking; discipline your tongue and temper. Here is the discipline of Lent. Learn to say "no." Not merely to your desire for meat or desert or company; learn to say "no" when you are about to speak unkind and impatient words; learn to say "no" when you find yourself selfish and not willing to deny your ease and comfort; learn to say "no" when you are tempted to be covetous or angry or impatient. This is the true discipline of life; this is the meaning of the self-discipline of the Lenten season.

Special devotion is another meaning of Lent. We get into habits of devotion which may degenerate into habits of routine and lip service. This has to be looked after. This having solemnest words on our lips and no solemn thoughts in our hearts, this is evil and only evil. They be good words we repeat, "Have mercy upon us, miserable sinners." No words be better, but to speak them as we speak "good morning" to our neighbor, this will never do, for this is hypocrisy which the Lord hates. True devotion, that of the heart and not of the lips, this is the meaning of Lent and of all other seasons. Lent gives opportunity to have more of this kind of devotion, "Devote" means to "vow," "to make solemn promises," and devotion is the solemn vows we are making to God and the solemn prayers we are offering to Him that we may have hearts; hearts like that of Christ when He said, "not my will, but Thine;" hearts like that of Christ when He taught us to say, "Hallowed be Thy name; Thy Kingdom come." The more of this devotion the better. But we are so situated, and by Him who rules, that all our time cannot be given to this; we have work to do, and much of it; much of our time must be given to others, and much as we would like to have more time for devotion, we have it not.

But here comes a short season in the spring of the year; we may be able so to arrange our work, that for a while we may take more time for devotion, more time at church, more time in private.